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AUTHOR	May, Stephen
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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines, at a general theoretical level, what are seen as the key issues that are facing multiculturalism and, by implication, multicultural education as the world moves into the 21st century. The paper contends that it is necessary to reassess continually what mistakes have been made in the past, what obstacles still lie ahead, and, in light of both, what might be the best way to proceed. It cites the following challenges to multiculturalism (according to Carlos Torres): the ongoing critique of multiculturalism from the Right; the tendency of multiculturalism to concentrate on culture at the expense of structural concerns such as racism; the challenges that postmodernist understandings of identity present for multiculturalism; and the urgent need to develop a multiculturalist paradigm that effectively addresses and, where necessary, redresses all of the above. The paper charts the multiculturalist responses to these four broad challenges, as they currently stand. It concludes briefly by arguing that "critical multiculturalism" offers the best means by which multiculturalism as a paradigm might proceed in this new century. (Contains 6 notes and 119 references.) (BT)

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by

Stephen May

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Multiculturalism in the 21st century: challenges and possibilities

Dr Stephen May
Sociology Department, University of Bristol
12 Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UQ, UK
email: steve.may@bristol.ac.uk

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In this paper I want to raise, at a general theoretical level, what I see as the key issues that are facing multiculturalism -- and, by implication, multicultural education -- as we move into the 21st century. This is important not only because we are at the start of a new millennium, although that *is* significant, but also because we need to continually reassess what mistakes we have made in the past, what obstacles still lie ahead, and how, in light of both, we might best proceed.

Some 30-40 years after the genesis of the multiculturalist movement, even its critics are now being forced to acknowledge its increasingly significant impact on public policy, particularly within education. Nathan Glazer (1998), a long-time sceptic of multiculturalism, does just that when he concedes 'we are all multiculturalists now'. Multiculturalism, at least in his view, has finally 'won' because the issue of greater public representation for minority groups is increasingly commonplace in discussions of democracy and representation in modern western nation-states.

But things are never quite what they seem. As a proponent of multiculturalism, I obviously do not share Glazer's sense of wearied resignation. But neither do I share his sense of inevitability, for it seems to me that while multiculturalism has accomplished much since its origins in the 1960s, it still has many obstacles yet to overcome. As Carlos Torres notes, for example:

> ...the multitude of tasks confronting multiculturalism is overwhelming. They include the attempt to develop a sensible, theoretically refined, and defensible new metatheoretical and theoretical territory that would create the foundations for multiculturalism as a paradigm; the attempt to establish its epistemological and logical premise around notions of experience, narrative, voice, agency and identity; the attempt to pursue empirical research linking culture/power/knowledge with equality/inequality/discrimination; and the need to defend multiculturalism from the conservative Right that has demonized multiculturalism as an unpatriotic movement. (1998: 446)

Taken in reverse order, the challenges Torres highlights can be usefully paraphrased as:

- the ongoing critique of multiculturalism from the Right;
- the tendency of multiculturalism to concentrate on culture at the expense of structural concerns such as racism;

- the challenges that postmodernist understandings of identity present for multiculturalism;

- the urgent need to develop a multiculturalist paradigm that effectively addresses -- and, where necessary, redresses -- all of the above.

In what follows, I will chart the multiculturalist responses to these four broad challenges, as they currently stand (or, at least, as I see them). I will conclude very briefly by arguing that 'critical multiculturalism' offers us the best means by which multiculturalism as a paradigm might proceed in this new century.

'Preserving' the nation-state

There are obvious advantages to the nation-state which help to explain its ongoing ascendancy. It liberates individuals from the tyranny of narrow communities, guarantees their personal autonomy, equality, and common citizenship, and provides the basis for a collectively shared way of life (Parekh, 1995). Or at least it does so in theory. As such, it is often viewed as the apogee of modernity and progress -- representing in clear political terms the triumph of universalism over particularism, citizenship over identity, and individual rights over collective rights. This is certainly the view of the nation-state lionized by a wide range of conservative political commentators (e.g., Bloom, 1987; Bullivant, 1981; Glazer, 1975; Hirsch, 1987; Schlesinger, 1992). It is also, of course, the position most closely associated with the Rawlsian strain of orthodox liberal theory (see, in particular, Rawls, 1971).[1]

The critique of multiculturalism which inevitably ensues from this position can be usefully couched in terms of what Brian Bullivant (1981) has called 'the pluralist dilemma'. The pluralist dilemma, for Bullivant, is 'the problem of reconciling the diverse political claims of constituent groups and individuals in a pluralist society with the claims of the nation-state as a whole' (1981: x); what he elsewhere describes as the competing aims of 'civism' and 'pluralism'. Or, to put it another way, the pluralist dilemma requires a complex balancing act between two countervailing pressures -- the need to maintain social cohesion on the one hand with, on the other, a responsibility to recognize and incorporate ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity within the nation-state.

Historically, two contrasting approaches have been adopted in response to the pluralist dilemma which Gordon (1978, 1981) has described as 'liberal pluralism' and 'corporate pluralism'. Liberal pluralism is characterized by the absence, even prohibition, of any ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority group possessing separate standing before the law or government. Its central tenets can be traced back to the French Revolution and Rousseau's conception of the modern polity as comprising three inseparable features: freedom (non-domination), the absence of differentiated roles, and a very tight common purpose. On this view, the margin for recognizing difference within the modern nation-state is very small (Taylor, 1994). Corporate pluralism (AKA multiculturalism) involves, in contrast, the recognition of minority groups as legally constituted entities, on the basis of which, and depending on their size and influence, economic, social and political awards are allocated. Glazer (1975) and Walzer (1992, 1994) draw similar distinctions between an approach based on 'non discrimination' -- which involves, in Glazer's memorable phrase, the 'salutary neglect'

of the state towards ethnic minorities -- and a 'corporatist' (Walzer) or 'group rights' (Glazer) model.

It is clear, however, that for conservative and orthodox liberal commentators only liberal pluralism will do. In the end, civism *must* be favoured over pluralism while the corporatist intentions of multiculturalism must be specifically disavowed. This is because, in their view, only the current organization of nation-states -- represented most clearly by the neutrality of the civic realm -- can ensure personal autonomy, equality, and common citizenship (at least in theory). In contrast, multiculturalism is accused of replacing universalism with particularism and introducing ethnicity unnecessarily and unhelpfully into the civic realm -- that is, 'civil society' in Gramsci's (1971) sense of the term.[2] Where countenanced at all, alternative ethnic affiliations should be restricted solely to the private domain since the formal recognition of collective (ethnic) identity is viewed as undermining personal and political autonomy, and fostering social and political fragmentation. As Will Kymlicka observes, 'the near-universal response of [conservatives and] liberals has been one of active hostility to [multiculturalism] ... schemes which single out minority cultures for special measures ... appear irremediably unjust, a disguise for creating or maintaining ... ethnic privilege' (1989: 4). Any deviation from the strict principles of universal political citizenship and individual rights is seen as the first step down the road to apartheid.

How then can one respond effectively and convincingly to this broad conservative/liberal position, the first challenge facing multiculturalism?

The problem of individualism

First, the orthodox liberal construction of the person as *solely* a political being with rights and duties attached to their status as *citizens* can be brought into question. Such a position does not countenance private identity, including a person's communal membership, as something warranting similar recognition. These latter dimensions are excluded from the public realm because their inevitable diversity would lead to the complicated business of the state mediating between different conceptions of 'the good life' (Dworkin, 1978; Rawls, 1985). On this basis, personal *autonomy* -- based on the political rights attributable to citizenship -- always takes precedence over personal (and collective) *identity* and the widely differing ways of life which constitute the latter. In effect, personal and political participation in liberal democracies, as it has come to be constructed, ends up denying group difference and posits all persons as interchangeable from a moral and political point of view (Young, 1993).

However, this strict separation of citizenship and identity in the modern polity understates, and at times disavows, the significance of wider communal affiliations, including ethnicity, to the construction of individual identity. As Michael Sandel (1982) observes, in a communitarian critique of liberalism, there is no such thing as the 'unencumbered self' -- we are all, to some extent, *situated* within wider communities which shape and influence who we are.[3] Likewise, Charles Taylor argues that identity 'is who we are, "where we're coming from". As such, it is the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense' (1994: 33-34). These critics also highlight the obvious point that certain goods such as language, culture and sovereignty, cannot be experienced alone; they are, by definition, communally shared goods. A failure to account for these communal goods, however, has led to a view of rights within liberal democracy which is inherently individualistic and which cannot appreciate the pursuit of such goods other than derivatively (Taylor,

1994, Van Dyke, 1977). In short, individualistic conceptions of the good life may preclude shared community values that are central to one's identity (Kymlicka, 1989, 1995a). Conversely, as Habermas has put it, 'a correctly understood theory of [citizenship] rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the individual in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed' (1994: 113).

The problem of neutrality

The disassociation of citizenship from individual identity, and the social and cultural context in which the latter is inevitably formed, highlights a related problem with conservative/liberal critiques of multiculturalism - a misplaced faith in the neutral state. Despite what conservative and liberal commentators would have us believe, ethnicity has never been absent from the civic realm. Rather, the civic realm represents the particular (although not necessarily exclusive) *communal* interests and values of the dominant ethnic group *as if* these values were held by all. In Charles Taylor's analysis, the 'supposedly neutral set of difference-blind principles [that constitute the liberal] politics of equal dignity is in fact a reflection of one hegemonic culture.... [it is] a particularism masquerading as the universal' (1994: 43-44). In a similar vein, Iris Marion Young argues that if particular groups 'have greater economic, political or social power, their group related experiences, points of view, or cultural assumptions will tend to become the norm, biasing the standards or procedures of achievement and inclusion that govern social, political and economic institutions' (1993: 133). The result, as Michael Billig observes, is a 'banal nationalism' which is simply 'overlooked, forgotten, even theoretically denied' (1995: 17) by members of the majority (ethnic) group who tend to equate unconsciously their ethnic and national identities as being one in the same. This process of elision, of course, also helps to explain why dominant groups so seldom come to define themselves as 'ethnic', regarding this as the preserve of 'minority' groups.

The problem of the homogenous nation-state

Taylor and Young's analyses point us to the third problem with conservative/liberal formulations - if there is no neutrality with respect to ethnicity, there is even less likelihood of any national homogeneity, and yet conservative and orthodox liberal commentators tend to accept such national homogeneity as an historical and political given, as simply the proper application of Reason (Goldberg, 1994). Conversely, these same commentators criticize multiculturalism's promotion of group-based identities (and the cultures associated with them) as both 'ethnic cheerleading', and 'nationalist myth making' (Schlesinger, 1992). However, this begs the obvious question, well rehearsed by now in the literature on nationalism, of the artificial, sometimes arbitrary, construction of national identity itself (see, for example, Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). In effect, national identity is no more immune to charges of contructionism and historical revisionism than the group-based cultures associated with multiculturalism that conservatives and orthodox liberals so decry.

Such recognition also makes problematic a related charge of conservative/liberal commentators that group-based affiliations are essentially preservationist rather than transformative in nature -- that they constitute a mere 'politics of nostalgia' at odds with the contemporary world and the inexorable forces of progress (see, for example, Glazer, 1975; Porter, 1975; Schlesinger, 1992). There is some validity to this position, particularly with respect to the problematic concept of 'authenticity', and I will explore its implications more fully in my ensuing discussion of postmodernist critiques of multiculturalism. However, for the purposes of this present discussion, it is enough to

point out that when conservative/liberal commentators make this charge against the 'preservation' of ethnic minority cultures, they are fatally undermined by their own attempts to invoke, in effect, a majoritarian version of the same process -- a prior, preeminent and apparently *static* 'national' identity to which all should subscribe. Such a position not only considerably understates the possibilities of holding dual or multiple identities, except oppositionally, it also allows no room for a dynamic and multifarious conception of nationhood.

The end result is not too dissimilar to the preservationist and group-based conceptions that conservatives and liberals have purportedly set themselves against. As Sonia Nieto (1995) observes, the charge of ethnic cheerleading by conservatives may stem more from the fear that *their* ethnic cheerleading is being challenged than from any notion of wanting to retain a common national identity 'for the good of all'. When this is recognized, the associated notion of a 'common culture' can be linked to hegemonic power relations, and successfully deconstructed. Common to whom, one might ask, and on whose terms? Who determines its central values and/or sets its parameters? Who is subsequently included and/or excluded from full participation in its 'benefits' and, crucially, at what cost since the 'price' minorities usually have to pay for full participation is the disavowal of their cultural, linguistic and religious practices (cf. Howe, 1992)?

The problem of fragmentation

A fourth problem centres on the inevitable connections that are drawn by the broad conservative/liberal critique of multiculturalism between ethnic differentiation, conflict, and fragmentation. While conflict and fragmentation have undoubtedly occurred from ethnic, cultural and/or religious differentiation, they need not always do so. Likewise, the national integration envisaged by many conservatives and liberals has not always resulted in -- indeed has seldom actually achieved -- inclusion, consensus and cohesion for all ethnic groups within nation-states. (Nor, one might venture, would some necessarily want it to). Rather, as Iris Marion Young asserts, 'when oppressed or disadvantaged social groups are different from the dominant groups, then an allegedly group-neutral assimilationist strategy of inclusion only tends to perpetuate inequality' (1993: 133).

Young's assertion can be taken a step further here, since it is my contention that ethnic conflict and fragmentation arise most often *not* when compromises are made between ethnic groups or when formal ethnic, linguistic and/or religious rights are accorded some degree of recognition -- as conservatives would have us believe (see Frost, 1997; Schlesinger, 1992) -- *but when these have been historically avoided, suppressed or ignored*. This is true, for example, of Canada, Belgium and Sri Lanka -- all cases, interestingly, that are employed by the conservative/liberal alliance as supposed exemplars of the fissiparous politics of multiculturalism.[4] If the contra-indicated position is actually the case, however, then far from ensuring national unity, the denial of ethnicity may well be a principal catalyst of *disunity*. In short, attempting to enforce ethnic, linguistic and/or religious homogeneity is far more likely to foster disunity than to ameliorate it (see May, forthcoming).

A consistent failure to acknowledge the significance of hegemonic power relations, and the attendant inequalities of access and opportunity facing particular minority individuals and groups, is by no means limited to conservatives and liberal commentators. Multiculturalism itself, particularly in its earlier formulations, tended to

do much the same. Thus, the second challenge confronting multiculturalism is this: how can multiculturalism move beyond a well-meaning but ultimately vacuous approval of cultural difference to address adequately broader structural questions to do with inequality, racism and discrimination, and the demand for greater formal recognition and representation of minority interests in the public realm?

Inequality, racism, and material disadvantage

For much of its history, multiculturalism has been plagued by an idealistic, naive preoccupation with culture at the expense of broader material and structural concerns. If only cultural differences could be recognized, so the story went, the prospects of an harmonious multi-ethnic society could then (more easily) be achieved. This strain of multiculturalism is most evident in the rhetoric of early forms of multicultural education, developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It is encapsulated, usefully, by Richard Hatcher's observation that while 'culture is the central concept around which [this] multiculturalism is constructed, the concept is given only a taken-for-granted common sense meaning, impoverished both theoretically and in terms of concrete lived experience. It is a concept of culture innocent of class' (1987: 188).

Hatcher's acerbic assessment formed part of a sustained assault by 'antiracist' theorists on what they perceived to be the endemic utopianism and naivete associated with the multicultural education movement (and its municipal variants) of that era -- a movement that has since come to be described as 'benevolent multiculturalism' (see May, 1994; Troyna, 1993). Such critics, notably the late Barry Troyna (1987, 1993), argued that benevolent multiculturalism constituted an irredeemably 'deracialized' discourse, an approach which reified culture and cultural difference, and which failed to address adequately, if at all, *material* issues of racism and disadvantage, and related forms of discrimination and inequality. While this broad antiracist position has been dominated by British commentators -- a result of its origins there as a neo-Marxist critique of multiculturalism -- it has also been articulated forcefully in the USA (see, for example, Alcoff, 1996; McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993; McLaren & Torres, 1999).

Proponents of multiculturalism have responded to this broad antiracist critique by acknowledging more directly the role of unequal power relations and the inequalities and differential effects that ensue from them (see Kanpol and McLaren, 1995; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; May, 1999a; McLaren, 1995, 1997). This more critical response acknowledges that the logic of much previous multiculturalist rhetoric failed 'to see the power-grounded relationships among identity construction, cultural representations and struggles over resources'. Rather, it engaged 'in its celebration of difference when the most important issues to those who fall outside the white, male and middle class norm often involve powerlessness, violence and poverty' (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997: 17). In contrast, a more critical conception of multiculturalism:

> takes as its starting point a notion of culture as a terrain of conflict and struggle over representation -- conflict for which resolution may not be immediate and struggle that may not cease until there is a change in the social conditions that provoke it. Rather than present culture as the site where different members ... coexist peacefully, it has to develop strategies to explore and understand this conflict and to encourage creative resolutions and contingent alliances that move [away] from interpreting cultures to intervening in political processes. (Mohan, 1995: 385)

However, in developing this broadly critical response, multiculturalists have also more recently come to face another, perhaps more intractable problem -- a problem brought on to some extent by this very process of accommodation with antiracist theory. For example, the privileging of racism over other forms of discrimination in early conceptions of antiracism resulted in an increasing preoccupation with 'colour racism' and the black-white dichotomy. This, in turn, led to a 'grand theory' approach which, in attributing racism as the primary modality in intercultural relations, came to be seen as both reductive and essentialist (see Donald and Rattansi 1992, MacDonald *et al.*, 1989, Modood, 1992, 1998a, b). Such an approach subsumes other factors such as class, religion and gender, and fails to address adequately postmodernist accounts of identity as multiple, contingent, and subject to rapid change. These emphases in antiracist theory also considerably understate both the multiplicity of racisms and their complex interconnections with other forms of inequality (Gilroy, 1992, Modood, 1998a, b, Rattansi, 1992, 1999). As McLaren and Torres observe of this: '[the] conflation of racialized relations into solely a black-white paradigm has prevented scholars from engaging more fully the specificities of particular groups and from exploring more deeply comparative ethnic histories of racism and how these are linked to changing class relations in late capitalism' (1999: 45-46).

But this is not all, since antiracist theory, up until recently at least (see Gillborn, 1995), also consistently failed to conceptualize and address adequately the increasing articulation of new 'cultural racisms', where 'race' as a signifier is transmuted into the seemingly more acceptable discourse of 'cultural differences' (cf. Rattansi, 1992, 1999, Short and Carrington, 1999). Thus, essentialist racialized discourses are 'disguised' by describing group differences principally in cultural and/or historical terms -- ethnic terms, in effect -- without specifically mentioning 'race' or overtly racial criteria (Barker, 1981, Small, 1994, Wetherell and Potter, 1992). New racisms, in this sense, can be described as a form of *ethnicism* which, as Avtar Brah describes it:

> defines the experience of racialized groups primarily in 'culturalist' terms: that is, it posits 'ethnic difference' as the primary modality around which social life is constituted and experienced ... This means that a group identified as culturally different is assumed to be internally homogenous ... ethnicist discourses seek to impose stereotypic notions of common cultural need upon heterogeneous groups with diverse social aspirations and interests. (1992: 129)

And this brings us to the third key challenge facing multiculturalism, since the problems of cultural essentialism and the reification of group-based identities highlighted by Brah, and mobilized so effectively by new racist proponents, also continue ironically to haunt much multicultural theory and practice. This is particularly evident within multicultural education, for example, where the regular invocation of 'cultural difference' often presents culture as sui generis (Hoffman, 1996). In the process, ethnicity is elided with culture and both come to be treated as 'bounded cultural objects', to borrow a phrase from Richard Handler (1988), which are seen to attach unproblematically to particular individuals and/or groups. This naive, static and undifferentiated conception of cultural identity, and the allied notion of the incommensurability of cultures, end up being not that dissimilar from the new racisms of the Right. Both appear to abandon universalist notions of individual choice, rights and responsibility in order to revalorize closed cultures, roots and traditions (Lloyd, 1994, Werbner, 1997a).

It is perhaps not surprising then that criticism of multiculturalism with respect to this issue comes predominantly from what one might term the 'postmodernist/left' (see Phillips, 1997) -- although, of course, even a cursory glance at conservative/liberal critiques of multiculturalism will reveal a similar degree of scepticism on this issue (albeit for different reasons; see below). The challenge posed by postmodernist/left critics is this: how can multiculturalism, based as it is on a notion of group-based rights, avoid lapsing into reification and essentialism? In effect, how can it codify without solidifying corporate identities, thus accounting for postmodernist understandings of voice, agency and the malleable and multiple aspects of identity formation? Not easily, is the short answer.

Groupness, essentialism and the politics of identity

The principal problem for multiculturalism here is that any notion of group-based rights stands in direct contrast to much postmodernist theorizing on identit*ies* which -- with its related concepts of hybridity, syncretism, creolization, and new ethnicities -- highlights the 'undecidability' and fluidity of much identity formation. Indeed, it is now almost de rigueur in this postmodernist age to dismiss *any* articulation of group-based identity as essentialist[5] -- a totalizing discourse that excludes and silences as much as it includes and empowers (see, for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Bhabha, 1994; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1992; Yuval-Davis, 1997a). Viewed in this way, multiculturalism's advocacy of group-based identities appears irredeemably passe.

Left/postmodernist critics are particularly exercised by, and sceptical of any claims to the validity of distinct (ethnic) group identities, especially if such identities link cultural difference and identity ineluctably to an historical past of (supposed) cultural authenticity. Such critics argue that this form of 'left-essentialist multiculturalism' (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995), of which Afrocentrism is often seen as an exemplar (see Howe, 1998), may well be motivated by a principal concern to acknowledge positively cultural difference, to address historical and current patterns of disadvantage, racism and marginalization, and, from that, to effect the greater pluralization of the nation-state, particularly in its public sphere. However, it does so at the cost of overstating the importance of ethnicity and culture, and understating the fluid and dialogic nature of inter- and intra-group relations. In effect, communitarian conceptions of multiculturalism are charged with operating a model of group membership which is at odds with the complexities of identity in the modern world (Burtonwood, 1996). As Edward Said argues, 'no one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting points' (1994: 407).

This broad critique of 'left-essentialist multiculturalism' is illustrated by two allied, although theoretically quite distinct conceptions -- cultural hybridity and the cosmopolitan alternative. Both celebrate the notion of cultural mixture and, concomitantly, disavow the validity of so called 'rooted' identities like ethnicity.

Cultural hybridity: the postmodern critique

The articulation of cultural hybridity -- and related concepts such as mestizaje and creolization -- is a prominent feature of the work of British theorists Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha and Paul Gilroy, among others. Hall's (1992) discussion of 'new ethnicities', Bhabha's (1994) celebration of creolization and subaltern voices from the margin, and

Gilroy's (1993) discussion of a Black Atlantic -- a hybridized, diasporic black counter-culture -- all foreground the transgressive potential of cultural hybridity. Hybridity is viewed as being able to subvert categorical oppositions and essentialist ideological movements -- particularly, ethnicity and nationalism -- and to provide, in so doing, a basis for cultural reflexivity and change (Werbner, 1997a).

Within the discourses of hybridity, and of postmodernism more broadly, the new social agents are plural -- multiple agents forged and engaged in a variety of struggles and social movements (Giroux, 1997). Conversely, hybridity theory is entirely opposed to universalism, traditionalism and any idea of ethnic or cultural rootedness. In line with postmodernism's rejection of totalizing, meta-narratives, exponents of hybridity emphasize the contingent, the complex, and the contested aspects of identity formation. Multiple, shifting and, at times, nonsynchronous identit*ies* are the norm for individuals. This position highlights the social and historical constructedness of culture and its associated fluidity and malleability. It also posits contingent, local narratives -- what Lyotard (1984) has described as *petits récits* -- in opposition to the totalizing narratives of ethnicity and nationalism. The rejection of totality and foundationalism in hybridity theory, and its replacement by a plethora of local identities, thus lends itself at one level to a politics of difference which is commensurable with multiculturalism. Like multiculturalism, the end result is the deconstruction and ultimate rejection of the idea of a 'universal', neutral civic realm. Accordingly, hybridity theorists, like multiculturalists, are fundamentally opposed to the conservative and orthodox liberal defence of the nation-state discussed above and argue, instead, for a *differentiated* politics of representation.

However, where hybridity theorists differ from multiculturalism is in sharing with conservative/liberal commentators a view of ethnicity and nationalism as misconceived 'rooted' identities. Similarly, these identities are ascribed with the negative characteristics of essentialism, closure and conflict. Postmodernists, like multiculturalists, may thus argue for the pluralization of the nation-state via a differentiated local politics, but they do so via a *rejection*, not a defence of singular ethnic and cultural identities. Rather, as Homi Bhabha (1994) argues, it is the 'inter' and 'in-between', the liminal 'third space' of translation, which carries the burden of the meaning(s) of culture in this postmodern, postcolonial world. Others have described this process as one of 'border crossing' (see Anzaldúa, 1987; di Leonardo, 1994; Giroux, 1992; Rosaldo, 1989).

Hybridity theory, as part of the wider postmodern critique, appears to offer us, among other things, a more contingent, situational account of identity and culture -- a process which involves 'decentring' the subject (Rattansi, 1999) and contesting essentialism wherever it is found. But there are also limits to hybridity. First, in arguing for the inter and in-between, hybridity is still predicated on the notion of (previous) cultures as complex wholes (Friedman, 1997; Wicker, 1997). In juxtaposing the merits of the heterogeneous hybrid against the homogenous ethnicist or nationalist, hybridity assumes that the liminal 'third space' is replacing the bounded, closed ones that preceded it. Border crossing, in effect, assumes that (closed) borders were there to begin with. However, as Jonathan Friedman (1997) points out, this simply perpetuates an essentialist conception of culture rather than subverting it since, as Levi Strauss (1994) has argued, all cultures are heterogeneous, arising out of cultural mixture. The juxtaposition of purity/hybridity, authenticity/mixture -- so central to hybridity theory -- is thus fundamentally misconceived. In the end, hybridity is meaningless as a

description of 'culture' because it museumizes culture as 'a thing' (Werbner, 1997a; see also Caglar, 1997; Modood, 1998a).

Second, an advocacy of hybridity carries with it the imputation that all group-based identities are essentialist. This is most clearly demonstrated in the conflation of ethnicity and nationalism with racism which, as so called 'rooted' identities, are all treated with equal disparagement (see Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992; Chambers, 1994; Gilroy, 1987). This is simply wrong. There are many examples of ethnic and national categorization which do involve the imputation of essentialized notions of racial and/or cultural difference, leading in turn to social and/or political closure, hierarchization, exclusion and/or violence. The cultural racism of the New Right is an obvious example here, as indeed are some conservative conceptions of the nation-state (see, for example, Schlesinger, 1992). But while ethnic and national categories may be essentialized in the same way as 'race' categories have been historically, they need not always be. Nor are ethnic relations necessarily hierarchical, exploitative and conflictual in the same way that 'race relations' invariably are (Jenkins 1994, 1997; Rex, 1973). Indeed, it has often been the case that the global impact of racism has overridden previously non-hierarchized ethnic categories (Balibar, 1991; Fenton, 1999). In similar vein, Werbner (1997b) has argued that the politics of ethnicity, which objectifies communities situationally and pragmatically with regard to questions of redistributive justice in the public sphere, can be clearly distinguished from the violent essentializing of racism.

The failure to make these crucial distinctions points to a third weakness of hybridity theory -- the considerable disparity between the intellectual celebration of hybridity and the reality of the postmodern world. This world *is* increasingly one of fractured, and fracturing identities. But these identities are generally *not* hybrid, just the opposite, in fact. Nation-states, as conservatives and liberals will be the first to tell you, are facing a plethora of ethnic, regional and other social and cultural minority demands, many of which are couched in singular, collectivist terms. The tendency to rootedness and to boundary maintenance thus militates against ecumenism, and these tendencies are generated and reinforced by the real fragmentation occurring within and between nation-states in a global era (Friedman, 1997). Given this, Friedman proceeds to observe, the valorization of hybridization is largely self-referential and self-congratulatory:

> hybrids, and hybridization theorists are products of a group that self-identifies and/or identifies the world in such terms, not as a result of ethnographic understanding, but as an act of self-definition -- indeed, of self-essentializing -- which becomes definition for others via the forces of socialization inherent in the structures of power that such groups occupy: intellectuals close to the media, the media intelligentsia itself; in a sense, all those [and, one might add, *only* those] who can afford a cosmopolitan identity. (1997: 81)

Ahmad (1995), in a similarly scathing critique, argues that articulations of hybridity fail to address adequately the social and political continuities and transformations that underpin individual and collective action in the real world. In that world, he argues, political agency is 'constituted not in flux or displacement but in given historical locations'. Moreover, it is sustained by a coherent 'sense of place, of belonging, of some stable commitment to one's class or gender or nation' (1995: 16, 14).

The cosmopolitan alternative

These arguments and counter-arguments with regard to hybridity theory are strongly echoed in debates within liberal political theory around the closely allied notion of the 'cosmopolitan alternative' (Waldron, 1993, 1995; see also Hannerz, 1992). Jeremy Waldron, in a trenchant critique of group-based rights, objects to the idea that our choices and self-identity are defined by our ethnicity and asserts, instead, the need for a 'cosmopolitan alternative'. As he dismissively observes, 'though we may drape ourselves in the distinctive costumes of our ethnic heritage and immure ourselves in an environment designed to minimize our sense of relation with the outside world, no honest account of our being will be complete without an account of our dependence on larger social and political structures that goes far beyond the particular community with which we pretend to identify' (1995: 104). On this view, people can pick and choose 'cultural fragments' from various ethnocultural sources, without feeling an allegiance to any one in particular. Thus, Waldron argues, an Irish American who eats Chinese food, reads Grimm's Fairy Tales to their child, and listens to Italian opera actually lives in a 'a kaleidoscope of cultures'. While Waldron concedes that we need cultural meanings of some kind, he argues that we do not need *specific* cultural frameworks: 'we need to understand our choices in the contexts in which they make sense, but we do not need any single context to structure our choices. To put it crudely, we need culture, but we do not need cultural integrity' (1995: 108).

Like hybridity theory, Waldron proceeds on this basis to argue that any advocacy of group-based identities, and specific rights which may be seen to attach to these, necessarily assumes an homogenous conception of ethnic groups (see Waldron, 1995: 103-105). Likewise, he is particularly critical of notions of cultural 'purity' and 'authenticity' which, he asserts, are regularly employed by ethnic minority groups in support of differential treatment in the public sphere. These attempts at cultural delineation are manifestly artificial in his view and can only result in cultural stasis and isolationism.

However, as Will Kymlicka (1995a) has countered, also from within liberal theory, the assertion of minority recognition and difference, and particular rights associated with this, is most often *not* based on some simplistic desire for cultural 'purity'. Advocates of multiculturalism are rarely seeking to preserve their 'authentic' culture if that means returning to cultural practices long past. If it was, it would soon meet widespread opposition from individual members. Rather, it is the right 'to maintain one's membership in a distinct culture, and to continue developing that culture in the same (impure) way that the members of majority cultures are able to develop theirs' (1995a: 105). Cultural change, adaptation and interaction are entirely consistent with such a position. As Kymlicka argues elsewhere (1995b: 8-9), minority cultures wish to be both cosmopolitan and to embrace the cultural interchange that Waldron emphasizes. However, this does not necessarily entail Waldron's own 'cosmopolitan alternative' which denies that people have any deep bond to their own historical cultural and linguistic communities.

In a similar vein, Kymlicka asserts that minority rights 'help to ensure that the members of minority cultures have access to a secure cultural structure *from which to make choices for themselves*, and thereby promote liberal equality' (1989: 192, my emphasis). On this view, minorities continue to exercise their individual (citizenship) rights within their particular cultural (and linguistic) milieux and, of course, contextually, in relation to other cultural groups within a given nation-state. The

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crucial element, however, is that members of the minority are themselves able to retain a significant degree of control over the process -- something which until now has largely been the preserve of majority group members. The key issue thus becomes one of cultural *autonomy* rather than one of retrenchment, isolationism, or stasis.

In a related critique of Waldron's position, Margalit and Raz (1995) argue that people today may well adopt (and adapt) a varied range of cultural and social practices but that this does not necessarily diminish their allegiance to an 'encompassing group' with which they most closely identify (see also Taylor, 1994). Moreover, if members of dominant ethnic groups typically value their own cultural membership, it is clearly unfair to prevent minority groups from continuing to value theirs'. As Kymlicka again observes, 'leaving one's culture, while possible, is best seen as renouncing something to which one is reasonably entitled' (1995a: 90). Relatedly, he argues:

> The freedom which liberals demand for individuals is not primarily the freedom to go beyond one's language and history, but rather the freedom to move within one's societal culture, to distance oneself from particular cultural roles, to choose which features of the culture are most worth developing, and which are without value. (1995a: 90-91)

Developing a (critical) multicultural paradigm (fit) for the 21 century

Which brings us to the fourth and final challenge currently facing multiculturalism: what components are essential for multiculturalism to develop into a sensible, theoretically refined, and defensible paradigm in the 21st century? In light of the above discussion, I want to suggest the following.

- *Theorizing ethnicity*

What all the critiques of multiculturalism discussed in this paper uniformly fail to accomplish is an adequate *understanding* and *theorization* of the ongoing collective purchase of ethnicity and the social and cultural practices which may be associated with it, in the modern world. We may well demonstrate, as individuals, a considerable degree of latitude in our attachment to and choice of particular social and political identities. As such, ethnic choices and identifications may vary in their salience -- both in themselves, and in relation to other social identities -- at any given time and place. Yet, at the same time, we need to acknowledge, and explain why 'at the collective as opposed to the individual level, ethnicity remains a powerful, explosive and durable force' (Smith, 1995: 34).

One way this can be achieved is via Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus (see Bourdieu, 1984, 1990a, 1990b; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The application of habitus to ethnicity and ethnic identity formation has been discussed at length elsewhere (see Bentley, 1987; May, 1999b; Smaje, 1997; Wicker, 1997). However, for the purposes of this discussion, it is enough to say that the four key dimensions of habitus highlighted in Bourdieu's work -- embodiment, agency, the interplay between past and present, and the inter-relationship between collective and individual trajectories -- provide us with a useful means by which the continuing purchase *and* malleability of ethnicity, in its particular contexts, can be critically examined.

Another basis for theoretical analysis might be via a more Foucauldian approach to representation, discourse and identity of which hybridity theory is an obviously prominent component. If the limits to such an approach are acknowledged (see above), ethnicity can be usefully examined here in relation to other discursive constructions of identity -- both in terms of their complex interconnections and, crucially, their ongoing distinctions. The intersection of knowledge and power -- that is, discourse as both a technique of power, and the terrain on which identity and meaning are contested -- is also usefully highlighted by such analysis (see, for example, Fiske, 1996; Giroux, 1997; Hall, 1997; Shohat and Stam, 1994).

These examples are, of course, not meant to be taken as comprehensive, but they do point to the urgent need to theorize ethnicity, and its consequences, more adequately than we have hitherto. In so doing, both the durability and malleability of ethnicity, its varied forms of cultural expression, and its complex interconnections with other forms of identity, can be critically examined. More pragmatically with respect to multicultural education, it will allow us to continue to highlight the importance of ethnicity and culture, without falling into the trap, too often made in the past, of essentializing them (Hoffman, 1996; May, 1999b; see also below).

- *Acknowledging (unequal) power relations*

In addition, a sensible and defensible theory of multiculturalism requires a central recognition of unequal power relations. Such recognition would allow one to avoid the mistake made by many hybridity theorists (as well as liberal advocates of the cosmopolitan alternative) of 'flattening out' differences, making them appear equal (Alcoff, 1996). This is both inadequate as theory, and unreflective of practice, since it is clear that when it comes to ethnicity -- or any other identity for that matter -- some have more choices than others. In this respect, individual and collective choices are circumscribed by the ethnic categories available at any given time and place. These categories are, in turn, socially and politically defined and have varying degrees of advantage or stigma attached to them (Nagel, 1994). Moreover, the range of choices available to particular individuals and groups varies widely. A white American may have a wide range of ethnic options from which to choose, both hyphenated and/or hybrid. An African-American, in contrast, is confronted with essentially one ethnic choice -- black, irrespective of any preferred ethnic (or other) alternatives they might wish to employ.

The preceding example highlights the different ethnic choices available to majority and minority group members; the result, in turn, of their differing access to the civic realm of the nation-state. In short, identities are not -- indeed, *cannot* -- be freely chosen and to suggest otherwise is to adopt an ahistorical approach which reduces life to the level of 'a market, or cafeteria' (Worsley, 1984: 246). Rather, identity choices are structured by class, ethnic and gender stratification, objective constraints, and historical determinations (Hicks, 1991; McLaren, 1997). Both hybridity theory and the cosmopolitan alternative -- as well as conservative/liberal critiques of multiculturalism -- fail to recognize this.

- *Critiquing the 'neutrality' of the civic realm*

The recognition of unequal power relations highlights, in turn, the fiction of the supposedly neutral, formally egalitarian, and de-ethnicized civic realm. Thus a defensible multicultural paradigm must be able to deconstruct the apparent neutrality

of civism -- that is, the supposedly universal, neutral set of cultural values and practices that underpin the public sphere of the nation-state. Civism, as constructed within the so called 'pluralist dilemma', is *not* neutral, and never has been. Rather, the public sphere of the nation-state represents and is reflective of the *particular* cultural and linguistic practices of the dominant (ethnic) group. The principal consequence for many minorities -- at both the individual and collective level -- has been the enforced loss of their own ethnic, cultural and linguistic practices as the necessary price of entry to the civic realm, no more evident than within education.

In short, culture has to be understood as part of the discourse of power and inequality. In particular, attention needs to be paid here to the processes by which alternative cultural knowledges come to be *subjugated*, principally through the hegemonies and misrepresentations -- what Bourdieu (1991) has termed, for instance, 'méconnaissance' or 'misrecognition' -- which invariably accompany such comparisons (see Corson, 1993, 1998; Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997; May, 1999b). When this is grasped, alternatives become possible. For example, previously subjugated cultural knowledges can be *re*valued and simultaneously employed as counter-hegemonic critiques of dominant forms of knowledge, along with the wider social, cultural and material processes of domination to which the latter contribute (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1997).

But even this may not be enough, since the recognition and incorporation of ethnic and cultural differences, even when allied to a critique of wider power relations, and the civic realm, does not necessarily resolve or redress the problem of essentialism. Indeed, the problem may be compounded, since an emphasis on distinctive ethnic and/or cultural boundaries may lead in turn to a further (unhelpful) implication of ethnic and/or cultural *boundedness*.

- *The maintenance of a critical reflexivity*

Thus, the final, and perhaps key tenet of a credible multicultural paradigm is the need to maintain at all times a reflexive critique of specific ethnic and cultural practices -- one that avoids the vacuity of cultural relativism, and allows for criticism (both internal and external to the group), transformation, and change (see Phillips, 1997). This reflexive position on culture and ethnicity is encapsulated by a distinction drawn by Homi Bhabha (1994) between cultural *diversity* and cultural *difference*. The former, he argues, treats culture as an *object* of empirical knowledge -- as static, totalized and historically bounded, as something to be valued but not necessarily *lived*. The latter is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledg*able*', as adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. This involves a dynamic conception of culture -- one that recognizes and incorporates the ongoing fluidity and constant change that attends its articulation in the modern world. Likewise, Stuart Hall has argued that a positive conception of ethnicity must begin with 'a recognition that all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, out of a particular experience, a particular culture, *without being contained by that position*' (1992: 258, my emphasis). In other words, the recognition of our cultural and historical *situatedness* should not set the *limits* of ethnicity and culture, nor act to undermine the legitimacy of other, equally valid forms of identity.

In the end then, this kind of critical, reflexive multiculturalism must foster, above all, students and teachers who can engage critically with all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including (and especially) their own. Such an approach would allow all participants in the multicultural debate, however they may be situated, to recognize and explore the complex interconnections, gaps and dissonances that occur between their own and other ethnic and cultural identities, as well as other forms of social identity.[6] At the same time, how ethnic and cultural identities differ in salience among individuals and across given historical and social contexts, and how these identities are situated in the wider framework of power relations, can also be highlighted, particularly with respect to the widely differing options available to majority and minority group members, both within education and beyond it.

Conclusion

These four components, in combination, constitute what has come to be known as 'critical multiculturalism'. Critical multiculturalism combines both structural and culturalist concerns, linking culture to power and multiculturalism to antiracism, in its deconstruction and critique of the organization of modern nation-states. In so doing, critical multiculturalism highlights and critiques the role of mass education systems which have served as the principal institutional agent of the nation-states' assimilative agenda (see May, forthcoming). Critical multiculturalism also engages actively with postmodernist conceptions and analyses of identity, while holding onto the possibility of an emancipatory, group-based politics. And, perhaps most importantly, critical multiculturalism provides a defensible, credible and critical multiculturalist paradigm which can act as a template for a more plural, inclusive and *democratic* approach to nation-state organization in this new century. Glazer, as much as he might not have wished it, may actually be proved right after all -- it looks like multiculturalism, and its social and political consequences, are here to stay. As educators, it is our task to make sure that we continue to remain at the forefront of its present and future development.

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Notes

[1] For the sake of simplicity, I will discuss both conservative and orthodox liberal commentators in broadly equivalent terms in what follows. In so doing, I acknowledge that this considerably oversimplifies the differences (both theoretical and political) between a wide range of commentators who could be said to fall within this broad 'neo-conservative' position. Be that as it may, my principal point is this: the conservative/liberal alliance reflects the complexities of a debate which often transcends and/or subverts traditional Left/Right political oppositions. Similarly, in the discussion of the postmodernist critique of multiculturalism which follows, we will encounter an equally complex alliance between postmodernist and (other) left-liberal commentators.

[2] As Gramsci argues, in order to understand any nation-state as a whole, one must always distinguish between its 'State' or political and administrative structure, and its 'civil society'. The latter comprises, for example, its principal non-political organizations, its religious and other beliefs, and its specific 'customs' or way of life. In making these distinctions, there are inevitably features which do not fit easily under either category. However, as Nairn summarizes its: 'that is relatively unimportant. What matters is that they are distinguishable, and that the singular identity of a modern society depends upon the relationship between them' (1981: 131).

[3] Communitarians believe that we discover our ends embedded in a social context, rather than choosing them ex nihilo. Their principal objection to orthodox liberalism is thus to the idea of a self divorced from, or stripped of the social features of identity.

[4] In each of these nation-states, conflict between ethnic groups has centred around the historical denial of cultural and linguistic rights to significant minority communities --the Flemish in Belgium, the French in Quebec, and the Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka (see May, forthcoming; Nelde, 1997).

[5] Essentialism is taken to mean here the process by which particular groups come to be described in terms of fundamental, immutable characteristics. In so doing, the relational and fluid aspects of identity formation are ignored and the group itself comes to be valorized as subject, as autonomous and separate, impervious to context and to processes of internal as well as external differentiation (Werbner, 1997b).

[6] In a parallel argument drawn from feminist discourse, Nira Yuval-Davis describes this process as one of 'transversal politics' in which 'perceived unity and homogeneity are replaced by dialogues that give recognition to the specific positionings of those who participate in them, as well as to the "unfinished knowledge" ... that each such situated positioning can offer' (1997b: 204).